

News Release

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Fish and Wildlife Service to Hold Public Meeting to Identify Issues Related to Proposed Kaua'i Seabird Permit

A public scoping meeting to gather information relating to the environmental review of the Kaua'i Seabird Habitat Conservation Plan, being prepared for three rare seabird species, will be held on Kaua'i on Wednesday, November 10, in Līhu'e.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in coordination with the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), will seek public comment regarding which alternatives should be evaluated in the environmental impact statement. The habitat conservation plan (HCP) is being prepared by the DLNR. Under the HCP, numerous applicants are expected to apply for incidental take of the seabird species due to adverse effects of light attraction and bird collisions with utility lines and associated structures.

The meeting will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School Cafeteria, 4431 Nuhou Street, Līhu'e, HI 96766. "The purpose of the meeting is to allow interested parties the opportunity to identify potentially significant issues and ensure that a reasonable range of alternatives is addressed," said Jeff Newman, assistant field supervisor for the Service's Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office.

Three seabird species are expected to be covered under the joint federal/state HCP: the endangered Hawaiian petrel ('ua'u), threatened Newell's shearwater ('a'o), and the band-rumped storm-petrel ('ake'ake), a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Species may be added or deleted during the course of the HCP development based on further analyses, new information, agency consultation, and public comment.

The three seabirds breed on Kaua'i, feed in the open ocean, and spend the majority of the year at sea. Adults generally return to their colonial nesting grounds in the interior mountains of Kaua'i beginning in March and April, and depart beginning in September. Fledglings – young birds learning how to fly – travel from the nesting colony to the sea in the fall. Both adults and fledglings are known to collide with tall buildings, towers, powerlines, and other structures while flying at night between their nesting colonies and at-sea foraging areas. These birds, particularly fledglings, are also attracted to bright lights that disorient them. Disoriented birds are commonly observed circling around exterior light sources until they fall to the ground or collide with structures, resulting in possible injury or death.

To obtain an incidental take permit, an applicant must prepare an HCP describing the impact that will likely result from the proposed taking, the measures for minimizing and mitigating the take, the funding available to implement such measures, alternatives to the taking, and the reason why such alternatives are not being implemented.

“Take,” as defined by the federal Endangered Species Act, means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct. Harm includes significant habitat modification or degradation where it actually kills or injures listed wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding, and sheltering.

The islandwide multiparty HCP proposes a 30-year permit period to address existing incidental take of the three seabird species due to existing and planned outdoor lights and overhead utilities. The multiparty plan is designed so each participant will have state and federal permits and be legally liable for meeting the conditions of the permits. To date, approximately 15-20 entities have applied for an incidental take permit.

HCP participants shall be required to avoid and minimize incidental take of seabirds associated with implementing covered activities and to mitigate any unavoidable incidental take by improving seabird survival and breeding success. The HCP will minimize the impacts through a variety of measures such as removing or turning off problematic lights, undergrounding high risk utility lines, shielding lights, installing motion sensors, altering light/utility structures, and training staff to respond to downed seabirds appropriately.

The conservation program will also include efforts to rescue and rehabilitate birds grounded by collisions or light-attraction effects, monitor trends in the number and locations of downed seabirds, conduct research to provide more options for minimizing or mitigating incidental take, and implement management actions, such as predator and invasive species control, within an active seabird colony.

The Service is requesting written comments regarding the proposed action from interested individuals, organizations, and agencies. Respondents should address potential environmental issues, applicable mitigation, and reasonable alternatives they feel could be included in the environmental impact statement.

Written comments should be addressed to Bill Standley, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Honolulu, Hawaii 96850, or faxed to 808/792-9580 or e-mail to bill_standley@fws.gov. All written comments must be postmarked by December 10, 2010. Additional information may also be obtained from Bill Standley at 808-792-9400, or by writing to the address listed above.

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